

SMALL GROUP COUNSELING FOR CHILDREN IN CHANGING FAMILIES, THE EFFECTS  
OF FAMILY CHANGE ON CHILDREN, AND THE BENEFITS OF GROUP COUNSELING  
WITHIN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:  
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

by  
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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Master of Science Degree  
With a Major in

School Psychology

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

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The Graduate College  
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December, 1999

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ABSTRACT

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School Psychology      Dr. P. Robert Wurtz      December, 1999    35 pages

American Psychological Association Format

Families are changing rapidly. It is now common for children to live with people other than their two biological or adopted parents. Single parents, divorced parents, widowed parents, foster parents, grandparents, step-parents, older siblings, and a variety of other parent figures are becoming more common today. For a variety of reasons, many children experience several family types throughout their school age years. Changes within a family are stressful for children and adults, however a child's stress can negatively affect his or her performance at school. Small counseling groups have been beneficial for children in stressful situations. Research indicates small counseling groups, geared generically for children experiencing a wide range of changes with their families, will be beneficial for children undergoing family change.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writer wishes to acknowledge and give thanks to Dr. P. Robert Wurtz for his patience and faith in me as well as his dedicated assistance in putting this research paper together.

The writer also wishes to honor and acknowledge Mr. Richard Cox and Mrs. Patricia Cox for the support and guidance given to me during a time of great stress, and throughout my life. I am grateful to you both for teaching me the meaning of family and love.

Special acknowledgement must also be given to two children who have made a deep and lasting impact on my life, Victorea Kay Lyons and Christopher DeWayne Lyons, Jr. May you be resilient and continue to grow to be happy and healthy individuals. You will be in my heart and thoughts always.

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## Chapter I

### **Introduction**

Every year more and more children are experiencing major changes within their families. New options for adoption, increasing numbers of children born out of wedlock, and higher incidence of divorce and (re)marriage of adults with children are some of the circumstances which are changing the composition of the American Family today (Appel, 1985). Some of these major changes include divorce or separation of parent(s), marriage or remarriage of parent(s), death or serious illness of a sibling or parent, joining a foster or alternative family, and birth or adoption of a sibling or half-sibling. Any one of the above changes, and others not mentioned, may result in the child living in a *nontraditional* family situation (Rose and Rose, 1992). It is often difficult for children to accept or understand that nontraditional family types are not *wrong* or *bad*.

The traditional two parent one breadwinner family is, however, no longer considered the *norm*. According to the American Psychological Association, only 25.5% of all U.S. households were made up of two-parent families in 1992 (1996). The increasing divorce rate is a factor that has contributed greatly to the decline of the typical family. According to Wineberg, today over a million divorces occur annually (1999). Several studies have found that the divorce rate has increased dramatically, and has remained at 50% for first marriages (Costa and Stiltner, 1994; Beard, 1993; AACAP, 1998; and Bliss, 1998-1999). Bliss estimated that 50% of children in the U.S. will go through at least one divorce before they reach the age of 18 (1998-1999); and according to Kiselica and Cappetta, more than a million and a half children in the United States are affected by their parents' divorce each year (1996). The effects of divorce vary depending on the situation and the child. However, Rossiter(1988) and Clark

(1999) found that even minor changes as a result of divorce will cause some degree of stress on the children involved.

The divorce rate for second marriages is even higher than for first marriages. Costa and Stiltner estimated that 60% of second marriages end in divorce, and the rate increases with each successive marriage (1994). In fact, Bliss (1998-1999) stated that 66% of marriages and living together situations end in breakup when children are actively involved. The increases in the divorce rates contribute to a variety of family reformations.

Stepfamilies are becoming more and more common. Many studies have found that the number of adults who are married more than one time in a lifetime is steadily growing. According to Wineberg (1999), about 30% of young adults are expected to marry, divorce, and remarry at least once during their lifetime. Wineberg also found that 70% of women who divorce re-marry at least once, and Mandell and Birenzweig (1990) found that 80% of all divorced people remarry following a divorce. Clark, as cited by Ceglian and Gardner (1999), stated that 50% of all marriages today are a remarriage for at least one person. When children are involved, the marriage of one parent results in at least one step-relationship. This can cause a great deal of confusion and stress for all family members.

Current estimates by Costa and Stiltner (1994) and Bliss (1998-1999) indicate that at least one out of every three children born within the past decade will live in a step-family situation before age 18 and approximately half of all Americans are currently involved in some form of step-relationship. According to Church, one of the greatest concerns within stepfamilies is that the roles within a stepfamily are often undefined. She also noted that current vocabulary is often insufficient to describe some of the relationships within a stepfamily situation and that there are no real societal norms from which children within stepfamilies can model their

relationship roles (1999). The increase in divorce and (re)marriage of adults with children results in a large number of children experiencing the end of at least one family situation and the beginning of another.

The death of a parent or sibling is another very difficult change for children. In 1994 the U.S. Bureau of Census estimated that 809,000 children younger than 18 experienced the death of a parent (1994). Huss and Ritchie have documented that the death of a parent or other family member increases depression, loss of self-esteem, and inappropriate behavior in children (1999). The increase in the AIDS epidemic contributes to the great number of children experiencing the death of a parent. The Orphan Project of New York City estimated, in 1995, that 75,000-125,000 children will be orphaned by the year 2000 because their mothers will have died of HIV/AIDS (Rothenberg, 1999). Death and serious illness are crises and challenges for the entire family. When a parent loses a child or partner, parent-child roles and boundaries can become diffused and the surviving children's developmental needs may go unmet during the coping period. Today, a large number of children live in single parent families. When a child loses his or her only living parent, the child must then join an alternative family situation.

Serious illness and death of a parent are two of the ways a child can end up living outside of the home. Incarceration of parent(s), one or both parents' loss of parental rights, instability of parents, and extreme behaviors of the child are other situations in which a child is often placed outside of his or her family home. When it is decided that a child will live with someone other than a parent, the next step is to decide with whom he or she will live. Foster home placement is a common placement when there are no family members willing or able to care for the child. Foster homes are designed to offer children safe, secure, and structured environments in which to live temporarily until their parent(s) are able to care for them again,

they are adopted, or they reach the age of maturity. According to Mellor, it is well documented that children in out-of-home care are at risk with regard to their mental and emotional health, and their physical and moral safety (1995). Euster, Ward, Varner, and Euster (1984) found a decrease in self-esteem and self-confidence of children placed in foster homes. Euster et. al also noted that one of the unique stressors of foster home placement is that the children are separated from the emotional support of their families as well as the places and people who have made up their daily lives.

When family members *are* available to care for children, it is most commonly the grandparents who step up to take responsibility. Children from families headed by grandparents constitute a growing proportion of students in schools, and the numbers are expected to continue to increase. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 5.4% of all children under age 18 live in a home headed by a grandparent (Rothenberg, 1999). Thus, according to Rothenberg, there are approximately 3.735 million children in the United States who are living with grandparents. Moving in with a grandparent poses its own stresses for children. Even if the child was close to the grandparent before, grandparents are typically not in the disciplinarian role, and thus the new grandparent-child relationship will likely be a stressful adjustment for the child to make.

Baydar, Hyle, and Brooks (1997) found that another major change in the life of a child is the birth of a sibling. Even when a child's biological parents produce a full biological sibling, children experience stress. Babies require a lot of attention and parents have less time and attention for older children when they are caring for an infant. When the child is a half-sibling, the stress can be even greater. Often the birth of a half-sibling results in confusion as well as



jealousy. The half-sibling will have grandparents and other relatives not related to the child.

This can be very confusing, particularly for a young child.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

This review of literature was intended to identify the effects of family change on children and to identify the benefits of small group counseling for children who are undergoing, or who have recently undergone, some type of family change situation. With this information, parents, school personnel, and counselors can encourage participation in small groups for children in family change situations. It was also intended that this research be used as a base from which a family change group curriculum be developed. Recognizing the common problems and experiences across family change situations, and allowing children to work through these experiences and feelings with other children who are undergoing similar experiences, will contribute to an easier transition into the new situation.

Research has found that children, with higher levels of stress related to specific family changes, benefit from small counseling groups. Research has also found that children undergoing various changes within their families experience similar effects of the changes. It was the hypothesis of this study that children undergoing family changes will benefit from family generic change groups at school.

#### PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the benefits of small counseling groups for children who are undergoing, or who have recently undergone, some type of family change situation. This was accomplished from a review of current literature concerning the effects of family change on children and of literature concerning the benefits of group

counseling for children who are experiencing stress. The objectives of this literature review were:

### RESEARCH INTENTIONS

1. To determine the effects of family change situations on children.
2. To determine the benefits of small group counseling for children who have high levels of stress related to specific family changes.
3. To determine if children experiencing family change situations will benefit from small counseling groups generic to family change.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

The diversity of family situations creates a new category of family member relationships. These relationships are not always clear, and terminology can be confusing to everyone, including those involved. By defining some of the terms, it is the intent of this researcher to foster a better understanding of familial relationships and events in *nontraditional* family situations.

#### *Divorce*

A legal end to a marriage.

#### *Separation*

A break in a marriage. Separations can be legal, in which the courts recognize the separation. They can also be physical in which the couple has separated physically, but have not filed legal documentation of the separation.

#### *Step-Parent and Step-Siblings*

The prefix *step* shows a relationship acquired by marriage or remarriage. This prefix can be attached to any familial relationship (ie. step-grandparent, step-cousins, etc).

### Half-Brother and Half-Sister

Siblings related by only one parent.

### *Blended Families*

Blended families are the combination of biological or legal, step, and half family members. It is common for blended families to consist of two adults, child(ren) from the adults' previous relationships, and child(ren) acquired by both adults together. This family type could include any combination of step-parents, step-children, step-siblings, and half-siblings. There are many configurations that make up blended families today.

### *Foster Care*

A temporary placement of a child outside of his or her home with someone other than his or her parent(s) is called foster care placement. Temporary foster care is usually the result of a legal action taken to protect the child from a variety of situations. Parents commonly retain parental rights to the child and often continue to have visitation rights as well. Foster parents can be relatives of the child(ren) or non-related community members licensed by individual counties to be foster parents.

### *Parental Rights*

Legal rights pertaining to children. Parents maintain parental rights to their children except in severe cases of long-term child maltreatment or parental incompetence. Custodial and non-custodial parents often share parental rights to children.

## Chapter II

### **Effects of Changing Family Situations on Children**

Rossiter (1988) and Clark (1999) found that one of the most important things to remember about children is that they fear change, and that any amount of change can be

stressful for children. However, changes within the child's family situation can result in changes within every aspect of that child's life. Clark stated that the amount of time spent with each family member may change, household responsibilities may change, household rules may change, household routines may change, even the school the child attends and the friends the child has may change when family situations change (1999). It is also important to note that children, even young children, can feel the changes that are occurring in their environment. They are aware of the physical, interpersonal, and relationship changes within their family environment and are able to describe how they perceive what is going on around them (Divorce Source, 1999).

Children often view family changes in terms of losses. Any change in a child's family means they lose the family to which they have become accustomed. Children have many ideas and hopes about their families; and when change occurs, children need to grieve for their losses. Grief is a normal and natural process which children go through after a loss ("Information About Children and Grief," 1999). As children grieve, they go through many changes. Marta (1996) stated that denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are all stages that children may go through after a divorce, death, or other change resulting in the loss of family life as they know it. Marta also stated that peers and school personnel may see changes in the children's affect and behavior as they progress through the necessary stages of grief. According to Marta, school performance may decline during this grief period, and children may exhibit daydreaming, outbursts, a decline in grades, absenteeism, and incomplete work. Even if they do not display outward signs of distress, children undergoing family change are likely to have an undercurrent of anxiety, fear, guilt, anger, depression, and uncertainty that undermines their ability and desire to perform at school (Kiselica and Cappetta, 1996).

Costa and Stiltner (1994) also found that when children are stressed by family changes, the effects often manifest themselves in the school setting as lowered self-esteem and increased behavior problems. Crosby-Brunett and Newcomer (1989) found that learning difficulties, problems with school performance, and difficulties with interpersonal relationships are other manifestations of stress related to family change. Skitka and Frazier (1995) found that children undergoing family change have a higher dropout rate and lower attendance than other children. In addition, they found that children who have undergone major family changes are more likely to engage in adolescent sexual activity, marry at an earlier age, have more premarital pregnancies and experience early marital instability. Some of the negative effects on children of specific family changes seen in school are cited below.

#### Divorce:

According to Jeynes (1999), for the last twenty-five years research has consistently reported that divorce has a negative impact on the academic achievement of children. Also, previous research by Costa and Stiltner (1994) has indicated that the negative effects of divorce on children do not dissipate over time without intervention; and under the best of conditions, it may take two to four years for a child to adjust to a new family situation. These effects are of special concern and significance due to the large number of children experiencing divorce today. As mentioned above, Bliss (1998-1999) estimated that 50% of children in the U.S. will go through at least one divorce before they reach the age of 18. This means that about half of all school children have experienced, or will experience, the stress of a parent's divorce. If intervention is not implemented to address children's concerns about divorce, it is possible that schools will be half-full of children experiencing and manifesting behaviors related

to the stress of divorce and interfering with the learning environment. Children experience many feelings and express them in various ways while they are adjusting to family changes.

#### (Re)marriage of parent(s)

Current estimates by Costa and Stiltner (1994) and Bliss (1998-1999) indicate that at least one out of every three children born within the past decade will live in a stepfamily situation before age 18 and approximately half of all Americans are currently involved in some form of step-relationship. These estimates warrant attention considering that research by Costa and Stiltner (1994) found that stepchildren are more likely to have developmental, emotional, and behavioral problems than children living with two biological parents. In addition, Costa and Stiltner found that stepchildren are more likely to become victims of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, than children in typical families. The interference with learning, that accompanies manifestations of lowered-self-concepts and confusion of children in stepfamily situations, warrants intervention in school.

#### Death of a parent or sibling

Huss and Ritchie (1999) have documented that the death of a parent or other family member increases depression, loss of self-esteem, and inappropriate behavior in children. Children coping with an illness or death of a family member may have feelings they are ashamed to express. Feelings of fear, guilt, anger, and embarrassment may build up in the child and be expressed as poor school performance or disruptive behavior.

#### Alternative placement

Specific emotional problems experienced by children in out-of-home placement that Mellor (1995) noted include attachment disorders, anger, frustration, aggressive behavior, poor school performance, identity problems, concentration difficulties, poor peer relationships,

depression, and psychotic-like behaviors. Foster home placement is hard for children for many reasons. Euster et. al (1984) found a decrease in self-esteem and self-confidence of children placed in foster homes. Rice and McFadden (1988) found that children who join alternate families, for whatever reason, often have a great deal of unexpressed conflict. In today's wide variety of family situations, children frequently live with non-biological parents. In many children, this produces a feeling of loss, grief, and a lifelong search for one's self. Kizner (1999) stated that these conflicts are likely to be expressed in the school as maladaptive behaviors.

#### Birth of sibling or half-sibling

The birth of a sibling is not a new family situation. Children have been displaced as the youngest in their families, because of the birth of a new sibling, long before schools even existed. The reactions of children to gaining a sibling can vary greatly from child to child. Research by Baydar, Hyle, and Brooks (1997) has indicated that a temporary but significant increase in behavior problems of children accompanies the birth of most siblings.

Katz (1998) has indicated that *young* children who undergo major family changes may experience loss of toilet training, episodes of separation anxiety, and increased use of transitional objects, such as security blankets and dolls for reassurance. Katz also found increased irritability, aggression, sadness, fearfulness, distractibility, and sleep disturbances to be other manifestations of young children's distress over family change.

Family change is stressful for everyone involved. It is important that each member of the family makes the adjustment to the changes with as little negative stress as possible. School counselors can help children deal with family changes at school. Small group work is

one of the techniques currently being utilized in schools to help children who are undergoing family change to cope with these changes.

### Chapter III

#### **Benefits of Group Counseling**

Group counseling in the school setting has been used for over ninety years (Horne and Rosenthal, 1997). According to Horne and Rosenthal, group sessions were first designed to teach vocational and moral guidance; however as children and the world around them have changed, so have the counseling groups used to help them.

Tomori (1995) stated that group experiences provide students with an opportunity to identify with others who have similar concerns. Group counseling addresses the concerns of children in an atmosphere of peer support and positive exchange of ideas. Tomori goes on to state that the immediate feedback from peers and facilitator(s) allows the group setting to help students increase self-awareness and self-esteem. Tomori found that groups can also be an effective method to help children develop personal, social, and interaction skills and that group participation has been shown to motivate members to make decisions that lead to positive changes.

Since children grow and develop in groups, it makes sense that they would be comfortable meeting and discussing important issues in groups with their peers. Tomori (1995) stated that a small group setting can offer children the comfort of knowing that they are not alone with their concerns. This supportive environment can help to reduce feelings of anxiety. Group experiences may also foster feelings of belonging and support to replace feelings of loneliness, isolation, and helplessness. Tomori further stated that it is one thing for a child to be reassured by a parent, counselor, or other adult that she or he is not the only one with a



particular concern; but it seems to have more meaning when this reassurance comes from other children in similar situations. Forester-Miller (1993) reported that children can learn from each other appropriate behavioral responses to things they cannot control. This modeling of behavior is also an important benefit of group work. Forester-Miller stated that in a group setting, members learn to work within a group, respond to a group, and establish themselves in a group. Corey and Corey (1997) found that group experiences that encourage discussion of problems decrease children's indirect expressions of their feelings by withdrawing, fighting, or getting sick.

Group counseling can also expand the services of the school counselor as well, by offering services to more students at a time. The counselor can determine from group meetings if any member is in need of additional or individual counseling. Group settings also allow the counselor to observe social interactions and relationships of the group members. Tomori (1995) noted that this is important for identifying and addressing any additional needs the children may have. Corey and Corey (1997) also noted that observing social interactions and giving immediate feedback to the children in the group setting increases the chances of successful group experiences.

#### Utilization of Group Counseling in Elementary schools

At the elementary school level, group counseling can be usually divided into two categories, developmental/preventative groups and special concern groups. Developmental/preventative group topics include friendship skills, decision making skills, communication skills, self-esteem building, and interest groups (Tomori, 1995). These groups are designed to address the concerns of children at specific developmental ages. Tomori stated that special concern groups focus on common problems that members of a particular group

face. Some examples of these special concern groups include loss, anger management, moving, substance abuse, abuse survival, and various family change situations. Tomori further stated that special concern groups are specifically designed to benefit children experiencing stress related to a specific life event.

Although most small counseling groups fall into one of the two categories mentioned above; depending on training, counselors can utilize a variety of different approaches to group counseling. School Counselor training programs vary in the amount of preparation for group facilitation their graduates receive. Even though, according to Tomori (1995), among school personnel today, group facilitation is seen as one of the most important parts of a school counselor's job. In fact, a study by Comas, Cecil, and Cecil (1987) found training in group counseling to be considered one the most important potential needs of school counselors. A few of the approaches commonly used in group therapy within elementary schools are discussed below. However, depending on training and facilitation competence, it also is common for counselors to employ a combination of these or other approaches to tailor the group to fit the students and setting in which the group is held.

### Approaches

Solution focused therapy, according to LaFountain and Garner (1996), is an approach that has been primarily based on the work of Erickson. Erickson used hypnosis to help individuals generate successful solution to their lives, however deShazer found purposeful questions to get similar results. Solution focused therapy is concerned primarily with the behavior manifestation rather than the cause or source of the problems. It focuses on how the behaviors will be changed (Coe and Zimpfer, 1996). Often children who are referred to school counselors are referred because they are expressing behaviors that interfere with the learning

environment that they are in. It is often necessary, to decrease the amount of time learning is interrupted, to concentrate on changing the behavior first, and then work on the underlying cause of the behavior. This approach, according to Coe and Zimpfer, emphasizes empowering clients and respecting their ability to create and carry out effective solutions to presenting problems. Solution focused therapy has been found to benefit people who have lost power, respect, autonomy, and independence. Coe and Zimpfer found solution focused therapy to foster positive affect, independence, and a renewed sense of self-esteem.

Group approaches that are modeled after Gestalt therapy are also used in schools (Harman, 1984). According to Simkin (1984), as cited by Harman, Gestalt therapy focuses on the current active processes between the facilitator and the group members as well as the ongoing interactive process between group members. This approach allows the children to have more control over the direction of the group. The facilitator offers support and guidance, but does not control the group's direction. This type of group may prove to be most successful when working with older elementary school children or adolescents. Groups modeled after Gestalt therapy can re-instill a sense of control and importance in children. This type of group approach allows the children to decide what is important to them and to spend their time discussing issues that are relevant to them. Children may also take more ownership in this type of group because they are more actively involved than they would be with a more structured approach.

Studies concerning the benefits of counseling groups found a multimodal approach to group counseling to be effective (Crosby-Burnett and Newcomer, 1989).

According to Crosby-Burnett and Newcomer (1989), one reason for the effectiveness of the multimodal approach is that each child reacts differently to stressful events in his or her life.

Some children may be experiencing problems in one element of their lives more than others, while other children may be experiencing problems with other elements. In a group setting, the children who are excelling in one element can act as role models to the other children. Crosby-Burnett and Newcomer (1989) stated that a multimodal approach to group counseling gives the counselor a framework to systematically address the many elements of a child's life.

The student-counselor ratio varies greatly in schools, depending on location, size, and school finances. Tomori (1995) noted that in schools where the ratio is higher, students without behavior problems may have little to no contact with the school counselor. Participating in a small group allows the children in a school to develop a relationship with the counselor. Tomori found that once established, this relationship will make it easier for the children to approach the counselor privately to discuss problems they may be experiencing or for individual counseling.

The use of group counseling in schools is on the rise. A study completed in 1987 found only 20% of counselors at any level to be involved in group facilitation at any given time (Dansby, 1996). However, Dansby found in a later study in 1996, that the numbers rose to 72% at the elementary level, 49% at the middle school level, and 58% at the high school level. Group counseling has been one of the major roles of school counselors for many years. Tomori (1995) stated that teachers and school counselors from all levels agree that small group counseling is practical and vital for servicing children in schools. In fact, according to Gerler (1992), many counselors believe that small group counseling has a direct impact on the success of students and should occupy the majority of school counselors' time at school. Results from a previous literature review also indicated that school counseling interventions, including small group facilitation, have a substantial positive impact on the educational and personal development of students (Borders and Drury, 1992). Despite the apparent

agreement among professionals that counseling groups within the school are practical and beneficial, small group counseling is still underutilized in most schools. Dansby found that lack of time and teacher support have been listed as the top reasons for the underutilization of small counseling groups.

In the schools today, children are faced with new and complex situations that can be very stressful. Dansby (1996) found that small counseling groups have proven to be beneficial in many of these situations. According to Dansby, in the 1993-1994 school year, the most common types of elementary school counseling groups included friendship groups and groups for children of divorced or divorcing parents. Dansby stated that although each child comes to the group with his or her own personal goals, maximizing school learning, and decreasing disruptive or maladaptive behaviors are some of the most important goals for school-based counseling groups.

Groups are not *cure-alls*. Although group has been shown to be successful in many situations to decrease negative effects of family change, it is important not to mistake group counseling for shortcuts to changing undesirable behaviors in children. Fostering change is difficult and group participation is usually not the only means necessary to bring about change (Tomori, 1995).

## Chapter IV

### Discussion

Research has shown a trend in the direction of decreasing family stability and increasing family dysfunction. School based groups can be powerful tools for addressing the needs of children undergoing family changes. According to Costa (1994), the use of family change groups can also be an effective prevention/intervention strategy to support students

who will soon undergo family change. Many children don't fully understand why family change is occurring in their families. Rose and Rose (1992) stated that children often feel responsible for changes within their families, and view any change as bad. In addition, Rose and Rose found that it is common for children undergoing a change which alters their family situation away from the two biological parents under one roof situation, to view their new family situation as *abnormal* and *wrong*. Rose and Rose further stated that feelings of guilt and anger can greatly inhibit learning at school and children who feel guilt or anger are often disruptive in class.

One of the benefits specific to groups addressing family changes is that children are given the time to discuss and understand the unique and sometimes confusing relationships that exist when families restructure themselves after change. In order to reduce confusion and resentment, it is necessary for children to understand the relationships that exist within their families. According to Rose and Rose (1992), groups generic to family change situations have the added goals of increasing children's abilities to talk about their thoughts and feelings with their parents, and to describe the advantages and acceptability of their own unique family compositions .

This researcher has found a shortage of empirical studies that have focused on the effects of counseling groups that are generic to various family change situations and include children experiencing various family changes. Research has indicated that the great variation in family structure today is expected to increase in years to come. The similarities in the effects among children experiencing various family changes indicates that children may benefit from a group generic to family change. The children will gain an understanding that families are not all the same, and that no one family type is *right* or *wrong*. The great number of students

experiencing one or more major change within their families, the negative effect these changes can have on school performance, and the benefits of group counseling indicate a great need for more groups for children experiencing family change.

This researcher has found many studies that have focused on determining the effects of small group counseling on children who have experienced specific family changes. The effects on children of divorce groups, groups for children who have experienced death or serious illness, and groups for children in out-of-home placement have been found in the research. These studies have found positive effects results such as, decreases in depression, anxiety, and negative feelings about the situations (Gwynn and Brantly, 1987; Skitka and Frazier, 1995; Crosby-Burnett and Newcomer, 1989). Other studies have found improvement in children's self-concept and adaptive skills, reduced problem behaviors, and increased competencies following group participation (Brantly and Gwynn 1987; Skitka and Frazier, 1995; and Mellor, 1995).

Group counseling in elementary schools has been on the rise recently. However, research indicates that they are still underutilized when considering the great number of children displaying negative manifestations of stress at school (Dansby, 1996). Research has also indicated that school personnel agree that small group counseling is an effective and productive use of the school counselor's time. The statement by Costa (1994) "The need for family change groups in the schools to ameliorate problems that interfere with learning is clearly evident" indicates that family change groups have a positive effect on children experiencing family change.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The following are recommendations to school counselors, school psychologists, mental health counselors, social workers and any other professional concerned with the emotional development of children experiencing family change:

1. It is recommended that groups designed to benefit children experiencing various family change situations, be utilized in school settings.
2. Development of group curriculum generic to family change is recommended to make utilization of family change groups easier.
3. Increased utilization of all types of group counseling in schools is recommended to extend the benefits of group counseling to more children.
4. It is recommended that school counselors be trained in group facilitation to increase the chances of group utilization by the counselor and to increase the effectiveness of group counseling.
5. It is recommended that further empirical research be completed utilizing better methods of data collection ( i.e. control studies and double blind studies).



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